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AUTHOR Partridge, Don L.
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ABSTRACT

The paper reviews the background of P.L. 94-142 (Education for All Handicapped Children Act) and proposes a curriculum model based on the law's least restrictive alternative concept. Goals of the model are reported to cover three broad areas: student development, organizational efficiency, and accountability. Traditional areas of curriculum planning are seen to include cognitive, psychomotor, career-vocational, personal, and socialization areas. Benefits of the model or profile approach to the least restrictive environmental needs of a child are discussed. (SBH)

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Tuesday, June 27, 1978
8:30 - 10:00 a.m.
"Planning for the Least Restrictive Alternative," Panel 6

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Curriculum Planning Model
Program Design
Ideologies
"Mainstreaming"

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Don L. Partridge, Associate Commissioner
for Special Education
Texas Education Agency
201 East Eleventh Street
Austin, Texas 78701 U.S.A.
(512) 475-3009

"The Least Restrictive Alternative: A Proposed Curriculum Model"

If the concept of "Least Restrictive Alternative" is to be a facet of the program of public education for handicapped pupils, then that concept must be included in the Goals for Public School Education in Texas. The Goals are in three broad areas: (1) student development, (2) organizational efficiency, and (3) accountability.

The philosophical premise is that there are more similiarities of needs between handicapped and nonhandicapped children than there are differences. The concept of least restrictive alternatives for the handicapped pupil must be provided in the context of curriculum development.

The traditional areas of curriculum planning include cognitive, psychomotor, career-vocational, personal, and socialization areas. The curriculum base in these areas may be (1) established for nonhandicapped pupils, (2) adapted or modified, or (3) completely separate. Nonetheless, the goals should be the same.

In maximizing student development, learning must be the emphasis rather than teaching. The location of the teaching/learning station or instructional environment must be considered in the concept of least restrictive alternative. Again the least restrictive environment for the handicapped child is the regular classroom with a consultative special education teacher working with the regular teacher. The most restrictive environment would be the isolation room of a hospital; however, in such restrictive environment the pupil may still be pursuing the same instruction as that for a nonhandicapped child.

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Don L. Partridge, Associate Commissioner
for Special Education
Texas Education Agency
201 East Eleventh Street
Austin, Texas 78701 U.S.A.
(512) 475-3009

THE LEAST RESTRICTIVE ALTERNATIVE: A PROPOSED CURRICULUM MODEL

This is one of the most dramatic and innovative periods in the history of education--especially in the history and development of American education. The program concept of mainstreaming came into being with the 1970s. To further supplement this concept, the United States 94th Congress enacted Public Law 94-142, "Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975," which became fully effective in October 1977.

In essence, the Act requires a "free appropriate public education" for all children between the ages of 3 and 21 years in the least restrictive environment.

We, as educators, have been faced and are faced today with the prospect and immediate task of determining a baseline and examining the alternatives for moving from the most to the least restrictive environment in determining the educational placement of the child.

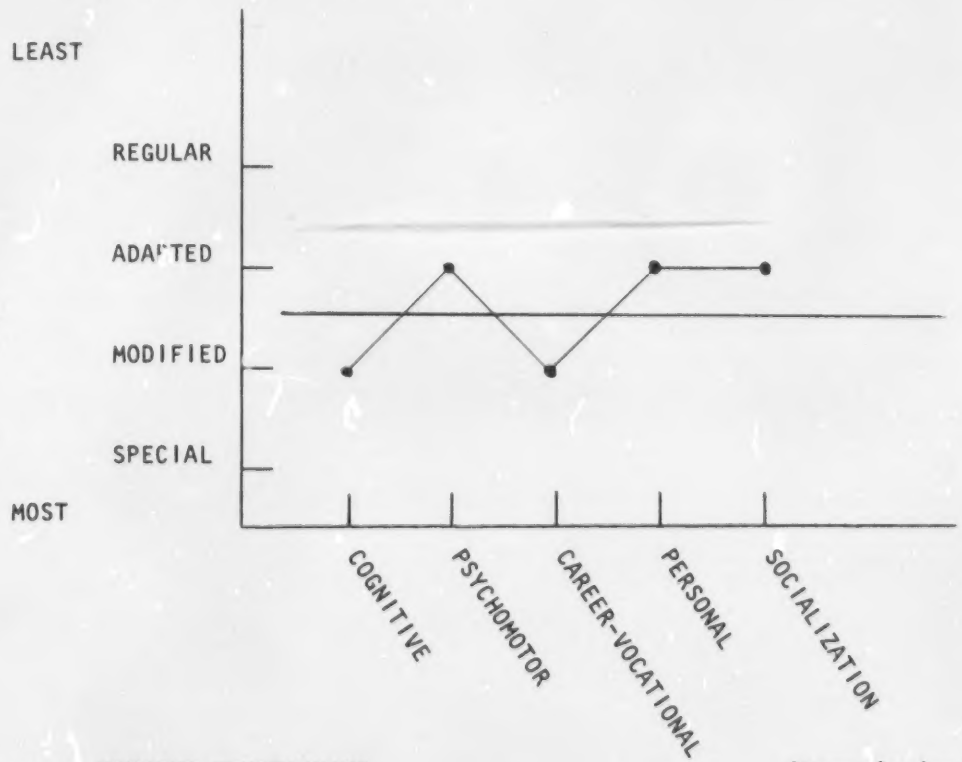
First, an awareness of the background of Public Law 94-142's least restrictive alternative is essential. The federal government requires each state, before it is eligible for federal funds, to establish

> ...procedures to assure that, to the maximum extent appropriate, handicapped children, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not handicapped, and that special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of handicapped children from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the handicap is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily, and procedures to assure that testing and evaluation materials and procedures utilized for the purposes of evaluation and placement of handicapped children will be selected and administered so as not to be racially or culturally discriminatory (Public Law 94-142, Section 601).

The law, which began its way through the Congress in 1971, requires that the handicapped children in the United States receive the full equality of the educational opportunity they deserve.

All educators, from local education agency board members, local and state administrators, and university teachers and researchers to parents and teachers, are faced with an extremely complex problem in order to determine the educational placement of a child in the least restrictive environment. It will be necessary, therefore, to view the placement of the child conceptually in a series of dimensions and/or overlays. This requires the process of thinking of a continuum, ranging from placement in a regular classroom to placement in an institutional setting. These are not judgments which can be made with ease; rather, they must draw on sensitivity, objectivity, and all of the professionalism at a person's command.

The least restrictive alternative--not in quintessential form--can be reflected in a curriculum model, although this model is subject to modification. It must be remembered that certain limitations and variables, inherent in "models," exist here. For a model to be utilized universally, it must have simplicity of design and general functionality.



The vertical scale of the model ranges from the least restrictive alternative, a regular classroom, to the most restrictive alternative, an institutional setting.

Generally, it may be stated that the primary task of special education is to provide the necessary assistance to the handicapped pupil so the pupil may complete a public school program. Therefore, the logical implication to be drawn is that the least restrictive alternative indicated in the model is the regular classroom.

Some handicapped pupils cannot successfully achieve in the regular instructional program but can profit from an adaptation of that instructional program and from peer-age-group associations in some regular instructional areas. These handicapped pupils can be successfully educated in such a program which also leads to the completion of an adapted public school program.

Other handicapped pupils must be provided a modified instructional program where there is little benefit from association with peer-age pupils who are not handicapped, yet these pupils may be expected to complete an organized program of instruction which is modified to meet the pupils' needs.

There are still other handicapped pupils who, because of the severity and nature of their condition, after a reasonable period of time have profited little from an adapted or modified instructional program but can be provided a special organized and systematic program of basic training (Texas Education Agency, 1976).

Another consideration of the model reflects the pupil's chronological age. While this figure is not plottable on the model, it is, nevertheless, an important variable in determining a pupil's educational placement.

The utilization of the model is its "raison d'etre." It is, in and of itself, its reason for being. When the model is used initially, the viewer/user can begin to conceptualize, dimensionally, the least restrictive alternative in the educational placement of the child.

The baseline of the model is divided into areas that are generally included in the development of a curriculum: cognitive, psychomotor, career-vocational, socialization, and personal.

Cognitive functioning is viewed within the Piagetian concept; i.e., the curriculum should be geared to match the child's cognitive level, and only when the present conceptual level of the child is matched with the subject matter will learning occur.

For implementation purposes, such an approach will require that educators see curricula based on sequential development from lower to higher stages.

PIAGET'S STAGES OF INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

Stage and Approximate Age

I. Sensory-Motor Operations

1. Reflexive (0-1 month)
2. Primary Circular Reactions (1-4.5 months)
3. Secondary Circular Reactions (4.5-9 months)
4. Coordination of Secondary Schema (9-12 months)
5. Tertiary Circular Reactions (12-18 months)
6. Invention of New Means through Mental Combinations (18-24 months)

II. Pre-Operational

1. Preconceptual (2-4 years)
2. Intuitive (4-7 years)

III. Concrete Operations (7-11 years)

IV. Formal Operations (11 years upward)

(Stephens, 1972, p. 48)

As the stages demonstrate, the child's stage of development will indicate his/her readiness for academic tasks.

Psychomotor functioning proceeds through sequential stages as cognitive functioning and affects the physical education program, the arts, and the career-vocational choices of the child.

Career-vocational orientation is a consideration in developing curricula from the time the child enters school, and it continues until the child departs from the school setting. The career-vocational orientation relates reading, writing, and mathematics to the varied ways in which adults live and earn a living and stresses the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for work satisfaction and success. This could be work-study programs of special education, vocational rehabilitation, and/or vocational education for the handicapped provided by special education personnel.

Personal development tells us about the perceptions/attitudes children have about themselves. The strength of the self-concept of the child will be reflected in his/her scholastic, social, and physical development. It gives an indication of how confidently a child will approach a new task in different areas.

The responsibility for the socialization of the child has traditionally been one of the primary tasks of the schools. Many activities in the school are centered upon the task of teaching things that are valued by the adults in society.

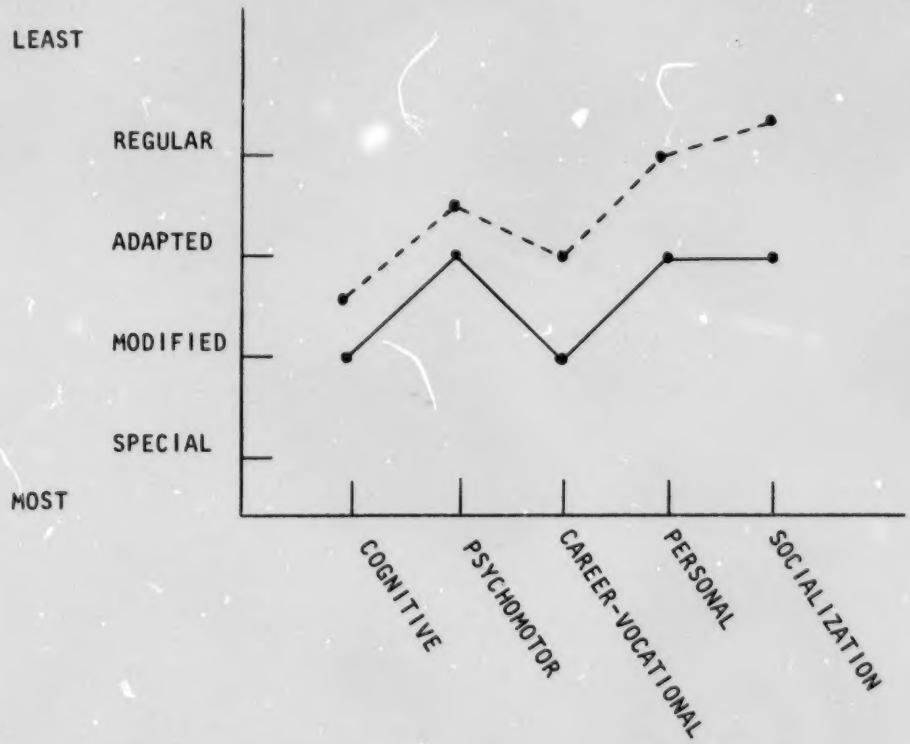
Another utilization of the model is as an individual profile of a child or of a composite profile of a group of children.

Too often we are limited in viewing the concept of least restrictive alternative as referring to cognitive functioning. This model can provide a gestalt for viewing the different aspects that make up a child's school career that may or may not require a least or most restrictive environment. Such a view of a child demonstrates that individuals do not develop evenly in all areas.

A 12-year-old child at the pre-operational level may be placed in a regular physical education program but requires placement in a modified educational setting for cognitive and learning activities.

It is essential that we begin to recognize that just as consideration must be given to developmental differences in determining academic placement of children in least restrictive environments, so must more consideration be given to least restrictive environments in the other areas of the child's education.

A profile of the child's least restrictive environmental needs must not portray the idea that the profile is where we expect to see the child remain, but should include an additional broken line that would indicate a projection of where we would like to see the development of the child in the areas of cognitive, psychomotor, career-vocational, social, and personal.



——— PRESENT FUNCTIONING

----- PROJECTED FUNCTIONING

Chronological Age: _____

The curriculum model stands isolated in considering the educational placement of a handicapped child. However, when the model is viewed in conjunction with the Individualized Education Program (IEP), a clearer, more comprehensive concept of the child's educational placement process can be realized.

The Individualized Education Program according to Public Law 94-142 is

> a written statement for each handicapped child developed in any meeting by a representative of the local education agency or an intermediate education unit who shall be qualified to provide, or supervise the provision of, specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of handicapped children; the teacher; the parents or guardian of such child; and, whenever appropriate, such child.

Included in the Individualized Education Program are:

(1) a statement of the present levels of educational performance;

(2) a statement of annual goals, including short-term instructional objectives;

(3) a statement of the specific educational services to be provided to such child, and the extent to which such child will be able to participate in regular education programs:

(4) the projected dates for initiation and anticipated services; and

(5) appropriate objective criteria and evaluation procedures and schedules for determining, on at least an annual basis, whether instructional objectives are being achieved (Section 602).

The Individualized Education Program, excluding its supplementary value in tandem with the curriculum model, serves other valuable needs for special education and related services which are designed to: meet the needs of handicapped children, assure that the rights of the handicapped children and their parents and guardians are protected, help states and localities provide for the education of all handicapped children, and assess and assure the effectiveness of efforts to educate handicapped children.

In addition, the model or profile approach to the least restrictive environmental needs of a child can serve as an administrative planning tool. After

individual profiles have been developed, a composite profile can provide an administrator with information on cognitive, psychomotor, etc., needs for a given population of students.

The priority areas of needs can then be used in probes in an analysis of the program to identify program discrepancies.

More specifically, at a glance, an administrator can demonstrate to a school board, to the curriculum department, or to the general education director that additional staff development will need to be considered in the area of socialization or personal development. If this reflects a need for children in an adapted program, then staff development is needed/recommended for regular/special education personnel in increasing their skills in effective areas.

Another use of the profile is in regard to staffing. If a need is evidenced from a composite profile in psychomotor, then perhaps a physical therapist may be contracted; or an occupational therapist for career-vocational needs to assist in long-term planning for the school district. Even transportation needs can be reflected at a glance.

An individual profile could assist in expanding the narrow perceptions teachers have of a child's handicapping condition. Educators often fail to recognize that children develop unevenly in the curriculum areas considered in the model.

An additional aspect of the profile is that even though the present functioning of the child is plotted, there is also consideration given to projections for short-term or long-term educational goals.

The multitude of uses of such a model for curriculum development, for administrative use in planning for improvements, and for teacher educational purposes emphasizes the reality that a child's needs cannot all be met totally in either a least or most restrictive environment.

The frequent criticism of models is the lack of reality which they convey to local school district planners.

This curriculum model may help to initiate conceptualization of where to place a child educationally, but at the same time the model serves as an indication of the placement characteristics which come from conceptualization.

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